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SUBJECT Russia and Israel

JACK ANDERSON: A startling idea has been discussed inside the Kremlin, an idea that could change the course of events in the Middle East. The rulers of Russia have seriously talked about reinstating diplomatic relations with Israel. And there's a certain logic behind this thinking. The Arabs have been unreliable allies. They've also been badly beaten every time they have fought the Israelis. And each time, the losing Arabs have blamed their Soviet weapons. Well, this is giving Soviet armaments a bad name. Yet the Soviets insist the real cause of the Arab failures is not in the weapons, but the troops who have used them.

As far back as 1970, it occurred to Soviet leaders that they might be backing the wrong side. This thought has continued to come up intermittently inside the Kremlin. Now, how do I know this? Well, I've had access to a CIA document so sensitive that it's classified not only top secret, but other code words that go far beyond top secret. The reason for the deep secrecy is to protect the source.

Now, according to this sensitive source -- I'm quoting now -- a growing number of Soviet officials in Moscow favor relations with Israel, arguing that the absence of Soviet-Israeli diplomatic ties favors Washington's Middle East diplomacy.

One Soviet official once confided to U.S. sources that he'd been told he'd be assigned to Israel.

The sensitive secret document adds -- I'm quoting from it again -- from time to time, other Soviet officials have said that the USSR has earmarked personnel for service in Tel Aviv.

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But would the Israelis welcome relations with Russia? Well, my sources say many of them would, particularly Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir. This would permit Israel to play one superpower against the other. It would also bolster Israel's international standing.

Meanwhile, it might be helpful to remember that in the Middle East alliances shift like the desert sands.